

# The Wesleyan Quadrilateral

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Some have supposed a connection or similarity between the PFRS four pillars and John Wesley's "quadrilateral." But this similarity is only superficial. In reality, the PFRS approach corresponds with Wesley's on only one point, the supremacy of Scripture.

Wesley's quadrilateral emphasized Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. The PFRS approach emphasizes, Scripture, grammatical historical hermeneutics, sound logic, and historical precedent. The table below compares our approach with the Wesleyan (Methodist) approach.

## Wesley on Scripture

To his credit, Wesley saw Scripture as the sole infallible source of truth. Contrary to the implication of the term, "quadrilateral," Wesley did not view all four pillars as equal. Scripture was primary in Wesley's theology. The remaining pillars were used to confirm his understanding of Scripture. This is not always the case, however, in modern Wesleyanism.

## PFRS on Scripture

PFRS views Scripture as the sole source of absolute truth today. While all of the Apostolic teaching, whether written or oral, was authoritative (2 Thess. 2:15), Scripture alone has survived intact to our time. It is therefore our only completely reliable source. The remaining three pillars of the PFRS method deal with how we interpret Scripture and validate our interpretations of Scripture.

## Wesley on Tradition

Wesley sought to validate his biblical interpretations using historic Christianity, as a way to avoid new and novel interpretations of Scripture. Hence, the Christian creeds are important in Wesleyanism, as well as some post-Reformation tradition. This approach, however, cannot protect us from ancient errors. It only protects from new and novel ones. The student of Church history soon learns that nearly all modern heresies are based on ancient heresies. Therefore, Wesley's appeal to tradition does little to insulate us against the majority of errors. An ancient tradition could easily be an ancient heresy.

## **PFRS on Precedent**

PFRS uses only the earliest tradition because of its closeness to the Apostolic period. Our premise is that the Apostles delivered the complete Christian Faith to the early Church, and commissioned her to defend it (Jude 1:3). We do not value all historic Christian tradition, but only what can be linked to the teaching of the Apostles historically. The early creeds were too far removed from the Apostles to be of any significant value. Tradition is valuable only as a witness to what the Apostles taught orally. Real Apostolic oral tradition rapidly diminished after the first few generations of Christians.

## **Wesley on Reason**

Wesley's method sought the agreement of human philosophical and rational thought. Theological concepts must agree with what appears rational and conceptual to the human mind. This approach is part of the reason so many Wesleyans (Methodists) are liberal. God's ways are not always "rational" to the human mind. Nor do all possess "the mind of Christ." Human reasoning is naturally in a corrupt state until enlightened by the Spirit of God, and free of all ulterior motivations. The acceptance of women pastors and even homosexuality by some Wesleyan denominations can be traced to the idea that human reason is a valid test of theology.

## **PFRS on Logic**

The PFRS appeal to "logic" is related solely to hermeneutics, and has nothing to do with philosophy, rationalization, or human judgment of morality. We seek to interpret each Scripture using sound logic — not violating the acknowledged rules of logic. When arguing for a specific interpretation, we cannot use illogical arguments or circular reasoning. Our arguments must be able to stand up to critical review using the universal standard of logical argumentation.

## **Wesley on Experience**

That Scripture must be judged by human experience is probably the most serious error in Wesley's method. One could easily deny all things supernatural based on this method, merely because one has never witnessed anything supernatural. This approach naturally leads to humanism, the enemy of faith. *"For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance"* (Rom 8:24-25 NKJ). Conversely, one could develop the most bizarre theology based on paranormal experiences! That the Pentecostal movement grew out of Wesleyanism is a demonstration of this.

## **PFRS on Hermeneutics**

Wesley's quadrilateral does not really deal with a specific methodology for interpreting Scripture (hermeneutics). The lack of a common approach to interpretation is the main reason there are so many different interpretations of Scripture. The PFRS approach is drawn from the example set in Scripture itself, where New Testament writers and speakers interpret the Old Testament Scriptures. It also assumes that Scripture is like any other literature, and follows similar norms of language use. Personal "experience" has no place in biblical interpretation, in our opinion, because it limits God to our own puny sphere of experience.